



# Hoosier



# Headlines

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Indiana NRCS Newsletter

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Issue 2

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## Heart to Heart ... with Hardisty

**\*\*Our Indiana NRCS employees have been diligent at helping people help the land. The results are apparent as you travel Hoosier roads through the country and view conservation practices applied on the land. But, as it has been said, there is always room for improvement.**



To evaluate our operation and find ways to improve our efficiency, an Indiana NRCS Operational Improvements Team was recently established. Their first meeting was held in Indianapolis on March 30 and 31, and they will reconvene on April 18th.

I want to thank Kimberly Neumann, Joe Williams, Shannon Zezula, Karen Castle, Brian Ingmire, Ben Lambeck, Pat Larr, Mary Lee Smith, and Angela Runshe for agreeing to be on this worthwhile team. And, I look forward to hearing their comments and recommendations.

**\*\*The USDA Office Consolidation Task Force has been busy with meetings across the state with a twofold purpose: presenting the drivers for consolidation and gathering information on where we need to be to get the job done. These meetings with SWCD supervisors and county committee members have been essential to obtain their local input on serving customers better.**

Chris Tippie, Harold Thompson, Elana Cass, Beverly Stevenson and Darrell Rice represent NRCS on the consolidation work team. I have great confidence that this team will report to the Indiana Food and Agriculture Council members on June 6th with effective recommendations on how to serve our customers more efficiently.

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## Volunteers – Essential to Indiana Conservation

### It's In the Bag!

Warrick County folks have celebrated Arbor Day for the past 23 years with a gift that keeps on giving. It all started by a suggestion to give a tree seedling to every sixth grade student in the county to promote tree planting. Jane Bruce with the Warrick County SWCD sought sponsors to purchase the seedlings and then approached garden clubs to help out with the distribution. Jane said, "Someone is usually kind enough to offer a place to work in a garage or greenhouse." She also acquired assistance from IDNR district forester and Purdue Extension educator to give hands-on tree planting demonstrations and talks on the history of Arbor Day to any sixth grade classes who wanted them.

Each year members of the Boonville and Newburgh Garden Clubs, along with Earth Team Volunteer (ETV) Don Phillips, gather to help Jane with separating, bagging, and distributing 1,000 tree seedlings to sixth graders in the 11 elementary schools. They have it down to a science, accomplishing the task in about four hours.



The District now receives positive feedback from parents whose children planted a seedling years ago and have watched it grow into a beautiful tree. The project has spread in popularity as

teachers and numerous others now request any leftover seedlings.

### Kudos to Dan

If you drive through Carroll County on April 22, Earth Day, you will see a large team of volunteers with rakes in hand. These volunteers, led by ETV and NRCS retiree Dan McCain, will work on flowerbeds and remove debris from Delphi's parks and the Wabash & Eric Canal trails system.



This annual project provides a great opportunity for individuals of all ages and groups from 4-H, Scouts, and churches to get involved and make a difference in the community. Dan is hoping to top the past 75 volunteers with a goal of 100 workers. The free lunch served by the Psi Iota Xi sorority and sheer enjoyment of seeing the landscape transformation is incentive enough to bring out a host of volunteers. Dan recommends that volunteers check the CANAL HOTLINE at 765-564-6572 for any last minute weather-related cancellation.

We at NRCS commend Dan as he annually organizes volunteers to celebrate Earth Day by serving the community.

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For assistance, contact the Indiana Earth Team coordinator in your Area: Northeast Area, Bill Lambert; Northwest Area, Julie McLemore; Southeast Area, Pat Larr; and Southwest Area, Michelle Phillips. Or contact Nancy Manion, Indiana's Earth Team Volunteer Coordinator at [nancy.manion@in.nrcs.usda.gov](mailto:nancy.manion@in.nrcs.usda.gov).

**\* \* \* \* Employee Spotlight \* \* \* \***

**Pat Larr, District Conservationist**

**Q: Pat, when did you begin working for NRCS, and in what positions have you worked?**

**A:** I started working for the agency as a student trainee in 1974... gosh, that's a long time ago! I worked in Lebanon and Noblesville as a student trainee, then went to Scottsburg and Charlestown after college as a soil conservationist. From there, it was a district conservationist job in Petersburg and back to Charlestown, where I've been stationed as a DC since 1981.

**Q: What do you like most about working for NRCS?**

**A:** I think one of the greatest things about working for NRCS is the fact that it's a stable job with good pay and great benefits, and we get those things all while making an ongoing contribution to improving the environment and helping other people. Not to mention the fact that working with other USDA and partnership folks is a real joy MOST of the time! And, it's hard to think of another job where you could work your whole career and still be happy about it at the end of the day--and that's pretty much where I'm at.

**Q: In your opinion, what is the agency's greatest contribution to agriculture?**

**A:** It would have to be the fact that we are the only federal agency working one-on-one with private landowners to help ensure that the land stays productive for future generations. With our focus on sustainability, soil quality, and land management in general, we are undoubtedly one of the primary forces in facilitating actions on the land to achieve this goal.

**Q: Tell us a little about your own farm, especially those critters you raise!**

**A:** I bought the first tract of land and house in 1988, and over the years have expanded it to include about 250 acres of crop, pasture, forest and wildlife land, and of course, a meat goat herd of about 85 animals. Applying several conservation practices/systems has helped focus crop and pasture production practices on the best land, while improving the marginal land for forest and wildlife use. Increasing and improving the biodiversity of the place has been a long-term

goal that is really happening! The goat enterprise started many years ago when a friend gave me four goats to help control multi-flora rose and other weeds around the old dairy barn on the place. Needless to say, they really did the job, and I liked having them around. I started getting serious about raising meat goats in 2001 when I purchased several goats of a breed called South African Boers to start raising kids for breeding stock and the meat market. Raising goats continues to be a great experience (albeit a lot of work), especially in the spring when all the babies are born. They are the cutest things! The market for goat meat continues to expand and will hopefully help the farm become more profitable in the years to come. And yes, I do eat goat meat, and it's good...and good for you!



**Q: You took the opportunity for an Emergency Watershed Protection detail to New Mexico in 2000. What did you glean from that experience?**

**A:** That experience is something that I will always be thankful for. It helped me see how important it is for people to work together to make things happen when push comes to shove. It also helped me recognize how extremely valuable contributions can be made by volunteers and others when they have the leadership and resources they need. And, it was great to see our NRCS

team in action in a true emergency situation...these are some really cool folks! And let's not forget that it was a chance to experience the beautiful New Mexico landscape, great food, and gracious people!!!

**Q: Do you hear from any of the co-workers who were detailed with you?**

**A:** The fact that a few of us stay in touch is really a neat thing. We get together at least once a year and hash out all the problems of the world and have lots of laughs and catch up on life in general. These are friendships that are cherished and will last a lifetime.

**Q: What suggestions and words of wisdom do you have for new NRCS employees?**

**A:** No matter what policy changes or program rules or frustrations happen, always try to focus on the true mission of the agency and your day-to-day contributions to it. Be thankful you have a good job, have fun and go with the flow...your blood pressure will thank you! And, don't sass your boss!!



## Soil and Water Stewardship Week April 30 to May 7, 2006

NACD has chosen “**Water Wise**” as the theme for this year’s Soil and Water Stewardship Week celebration. We all need to help spread the word about the conservation of this vitally important natural resource. Go to <http://stewardshipweek.com/> for more information on this year’s celebration.

### FOCUS ON THE FIELD

#### TO TILL OR NOT TO TILL. . . THAT IS THE QUESTION

Farmers hear a lot about lo-till and no-till, but want to hear what their peers who have experience have to say. That is what happened this February. A group of 70 farmers looking for advice on conservation tillage methods gathered at the Tippecanoe County Fairgrounds. Farmers who no-till or low-till their land, as well as experts from Purdue University and NRCS spoke to the crowd about the benefits of no-till. Farmer Tedd Riley from Brookston talked to the group about his no-till farming experiences, and Kelly Cheesewright from Dana gave a lesson on maximizing the bottom line. Speakers also included Conservation Tillage Coordinator Barry Fisher, who educated the audience on no-till corn transition, and District Conservationist Mark Eastman, who provided information on the Conservation Security Program.

District Conservationist Joe O’Donnell helped put on the workshop and was pleased with its results. Joe said, “Both novice and experienced conservation tillage farmers showed their appreciation of the workshop with their positive comments. Some even stayed after the program to ask additional questions.”

#### WHIPPING INTO SHAPE

Eagle Creek Park on the northwest side of Indianapolis is the 12<sup>th</sup> largest municipal park in the United States. It contains over 1,400 acres of water and 3,900 acres of dry land for activities. On any given day, depending on the weather, you may see boaters, fishermen, bird watchers, and nature lovers enjoying the park’s amenities.

Each park of the Indy Parks system has a master plan to direct its growth and improvement over a 10 to 15 year period. Eagle Creek’s master plan was established in 1997; and since then, the park’s staff has sought to enhance the park’s natural resources. Over the years former crop fields have been converted to a

natural mosaic of warm season grasses, trees, and shrubs. Many of the new forested areas have been planted near designated nature preserves as a buffer and protection for the landscape.

Those who have frequented Eagle Creek Park in the past two years have witnessed a dramatic change in the landscape. Eagle Creek Park Manager John Easley and Land Stewardship Coordinator Don Miller have worked with NRCS and the Marion County SWCD to utilize Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) cost-share funding for improvement wildlife habitat projects. In 2005, 63 acres of native trees and shrubs and 13.5 acres of warm season grasses were planted through WHIP. This year an additional 2.5 acres of trees and shrubs and 17.5 acres of warm season grasses will be planted.

According to Easley, Eagle Creek Park operating funds are generated by user fees that are charged. Programs like WHIP allow the park to increase the yearly plantings without raising these user fees. Essentially, cost-share funding through WHIP has helped them meet their master plan goals for 2005 and 2006.



Pictured above, left to right: District Conservationist Henry Wallis; NW Indiana Area Program Specialist Gary Warring; Don Miller, Land Stewardship Coordinator for Indy Parks; and John Easley, Eagle Creek Park Manager, Indy Parks

## March—Federal Women’s History Month

Where are the women? In 1980, a group of women noticed that women were absent from America’s textbooks. No more than three percent of the content was devoted to women. The group discovered that because of this lack of information, boys and girls and many adults assumed that women did nothing important, resulting in a false impression of women in general.

An example of this misconception was evidenced when an area clerk with USDA-SCS in Montana told her story. In the early 1960’s she drove into a gas station with her government sedan with USDA-SCS decals on the doors and government license plates. As the attendant approached her car, she said, “Fill it up, please.” He said nothing, just looked at her, then walked around the car. When he came back to her, he asked, “Does the government let women drive their cars?”

This stereotyping of women continued into the 1980’s. At an area meeting an SWCD chairman in Indiana expressed his concern about the women in SCS who would have to drive standard transmission trucks, because he *knew* that women could only drive automatics!

To address the absence of information about women in history and the subsequent misconception of women like those above, the National Women’s History Project led a movement to have Congress designate a celebration to recognize women’s achievements. The goal was to ensure that information about the myriad ways women have changed America would be part of our children’s education. In 1980, President Carter issued the first Presidential Proclamation calling on Americans to remember the contributions of women. By 1987, Congress and the President declared March as National Women’s History Month.

The purpose of women’s history is not to idealize women, but to simply tell of their achievements in helping to shape our nation; a story of inspiration, hope, courage, tenacity, and purpose.

## ~Hoosiers Celebrate~

This year’s theme, **Women: Builders of Communities and Dreams**, honors the spirit of possibility and hope set in motion by generations of women in their creation of communities and their encouragement of dreams.

To celebrate National Women’s History Month, a luncheon and training was held at the NRCS state office. Theresa Niccum, soil conservationist in Boone County, trained the attendees on “Working with the Hearing Impaired.” She spoke through an interpreter and provided a personal insight as a deaf employee working for NRCS.



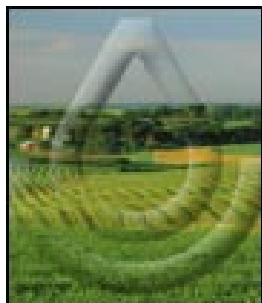
Theresa exemplifies the achievements that can take place by a woman who has determination to beat the odds and pursue her dreams.

## **LINKS FOR PARTNERSHIP NEWSLETTERS**

Indiana Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts, *Weekly Updates*:  
<http://www.iaswcd.org/WeeklyUpdates06.htm>

ISDA, Division of Soil Conservation, *Cultivating Connections*:  
<http://www.in.gov/isda/soil/news/index/html>

## Program Update—TSP



The 2002 Farm Bill expanded the capacity of USDA conservation programs to protect the Nation's natural resources on private and tribal lands. And, to better serve agricultural producers, the 2002 Farm Bill also encouraged USDA to use **Technical Service Providers (TSP)** to increase the technical assistance available to help landowners meet their conservation goals.

Now, there are 200+ TSPs registered and certified to provide technical assistance to Indiana's ag-producers. TSPs are required to adhere to NRCS technical guidelines for design and installation of conservation practices, and they are certified by NRCS for specific categories of work.

In March, the NRCS Technology Staff held a series of meetings to provide clarification to TSPs (and NRCS) on all facets of the TSP process including the certification process, payments process, NTE rates, required documentation/deliverables to the producer, where to get technical help, TSP liability, etc. There was a meeting in each area and one at the NRCS state office. There were 76 total TSPs and 41 NRCS staff in attendance.

Some of the key points that were covered in the sessions included:

- TSPs are an important factor in getting conservation work completed, and funding for program participants to hire TSPs has increased steadily over the past 3 years. Additionally, NRCS hopes to see more TSPs certified to provide assistance in a variety of categories.
- Contracts for TSP dollars are between NRCS and the farmer. We encourage TSPs to have an agreement with the producer that covers payment rates, timing of payment, etc. We reimburse the producer only if 1) they have a contract with us, 2) they hire a TSP from TechReg, 3) and they submit all of the necessary documentation to verify the services are complete. It is then up to the producer to pay the TSP.
- TSP funds are available to save NRCS field staff time. We expect TSPs to go to the producer for information such as plan maps, plans, contracts, etc., and to the NRCS-Indiana website at <http://www.in.nrcs.usda.gov/tsp.html> or state office for information such as technical resources and interpretation of standards, or for general questions.
- With each conservation practice planned and installed, there is a list of "deliverables" that must go into the producer's case file record. The list of needed records is in the Statement of Work for each NRCS Electronic Field Office Technical Guide Standard (Section IV of the eFOTG). NRCS will review quality of TSP work during the Quality Assurance process – it should not be necessary for local NRCS staff to review TSP work unless deficiencies are suspected.
- TSPs are liable for their work...but we stand behind NRCS technical standards. As long as TSPs follow NRCS technical standards, practices that fail will be covered by current NRCS policies and procedures. TSPs that operate outside of the standards are liable for damages/repair.

## **PERSONNEL UPDATES**

### **New Employees:**

Christopher Downing, District Conservationist, Connersville, 3-5-06

Ignacio (Tony) Avila, Technical Services Team Leader, Albion, 3-5-06

Daniel Hovland, Area Conservationist, Southwest Area Office, Vincennes, 4-2-06

### **Retirees:**

Michael Gribben, District Conservationist, Brookville, 3-3-06

David Sowers, Civil Engineering Technician, Greencastle Technical Services Team, 3-3-06

Darrell Lambert, Soil Conservationist, Huntington Technical Services Team, 4-28-06

Alvin Balmer, District Conservationist, Franklin Service Center, 4-29-06

## Featured Website—Save Energy Save Money

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/energy/index.html>

The Save ENERGY Save Money website allows farmers to look at ways to cut input costs, maintain production, protect soil and water resources, reduce dependence on fossil fuels, and save money—all at the same time!

One of the most powerful tools on this site is the Energy Estimators. These simple modeling tools help producers make energy-efficient conservation practice decisions. To date, Energy Estimators are available for nitrogen, tillage, and ag propane costs.

The website also features information about how certain conservation practices save money while helping the land, such as integrated pest management, precision agriculture and windbreaks/shelterbelts.



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## Mark Your Calendar

### April

- 04-18-06 NRCS Operational Improvements Team, NRCS State Office
- 04-19-06 IFEC Meeting, NRCS State Office
- 04-22-06 Earth Day
- 04-25-06 NW Area Meeting, Tippecanoe County Extension Office, Lafayette
- 04-25-06 USDA Office Consolidation Task Force Meeting, NRCS State Office
- 04-26-06 SW Area Meeting, Greene County Fairgrounds, Switz City
- 04-26-06 Camp Gallahue Environmental Workshop, Brown County  
to  
04-27-06
- 04-28-06 Arbor Day
- 04-29-06 2005 Soil and Water Stewardship Week...“Water Wise”  
to  
05-07-06

(more...)

## May

- 05-02-06 NE Area Meeting, Peabody Library, Columbia City
- 05-03-06 SE Area Meeting, North Vernon Library, North Vernon
- 05-23-06 NW Area Meeting, Tippecanoe County Extension Office, Lafayette
- 05-23-06 Second National Water Quality Trading Conference, Westin Hotel, Pittsburgh, PA  
to Visit [www.farmfoundation.org](http://www.farmfoundation.org) for information.  
05-25-06
- 05-24-06 SW Area Meeting, Greene County Fairgrounds, Switz City

## August

- 08-09-06 Indiana State Fair, Indianapolis  
to  
08-20-06

## November

- 11-28-06 Innovations in Reducing Nonpoint Source Pollution, Radisson Hotel City Centre,  
to Indianapolis  
11-30-06

Note: For a listing of Natural Resources Education Center workshops, go to [www.in.gov/dnr/nrec](http://www.in.gov/dnr/nrec)